

Photospot:

Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans* with chicks

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Un Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* avec ses poussins. Le Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* est un petit rallidé dissimulé qui occupe un large éventail d'habitats, de la forêt dense humide aux forêts galeries. Il est connu de localités éparées de la Sierra Leone au Ghana et du Nigeria à l'Éthiopie et l'Afrique du Sud. Certaines observations indiquent qu'au moins une partie de la population est migratrice. Les poussins, dont des photos sont présentées ici, ont rarement, ou peut-être jamais, été photographiés auparavant.

The Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans* occurs in a wide variety of dense habitats ranging from extensive rainforest (where it tends to prefer edges) to narrow strips of riparian undergrowth. It even inhabits relatively small patches of deciduous thicket when these are in leaf, although in such localities it appears to occur only seasonally. It is known from scattered localities from Sierra Leone to Ghana, and Nigeria to Angola east to Ethiopia, and south to eastern and southern South Africa (Borrow & Demey 2001, Taylor 2005, Dowsett *et al.* 2008). There are several isolated records of apparent vagrants (e.g. in Somalia and Namibia), some of which involve birds attracted to lights at night (Keith 1986, Taylor & van Perlo 1998) and this too supports the suggestion that at least some birds undertake movements. Although secretive, this flufftail is relatively well known; information was summarised by Taylor & van Perlo (1998), from which most data presented below have been taken.

The downy young have rarely, if ever, been photographed before. As with all flufftail *Sarothrura* chicks, they are black. Chicks leave the nest when 1–2 days old and their remiges begin to grow at 6–7 days, so the chicks in the photographs must be no more than 3–5 days old (Figs. 1–4). Families visit water sources together at least once a day, usually in the late afternoon or evening, when they drink and bathe (Fig. 2). Taylor & van Perlo (1998) mention that chicks bathe regularly from ten days old, but as can be seen in Figs. 3–4, they will do so at an even earlier age. Chicks will wet

themselves extensively not only to wash, but also to keep cool. They are not only brooded by the female (Taylor & van Perlo 1998), but also by the male, as shown in Fig. 5. They can jump and run strongly from 3–4 days and will begin to forage at a similar age, but are fed by both parents until their independence at c.3 weeks.

Photographer's note

These birds were attracted to a garden with a shallow bird bath sunk into the ground near dense cover. The sides were built sloping gently so that the water margins were only 1–2 cm deep. Because birds require a quick escape route into cover some dead branches and other plant debris were added alongside the water.

References

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Figure 1. Adult male Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans* with chick soon after bathing (Hugh Chittenden)

Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* mâle adulte avec poussin sortant du bain (Hugh Chittenden)

Figure 2. Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans* chick wading in shallow water (Hugh Chittenden)

Poussin du Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* s'aventurant en eau peu profonde (Hugh Chittenden)

Figures 3–4. Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans* chick cooling off following its evening toilet (Hugh Chittenden)

Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* poussin se reposant après la toilette du soir (Hugh Chittenden)

Figure 5. Adult male Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans* brooding chicks beside a shallow pool (Hugh Chittenden)

Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* mâle adulte couvant ses poussins à côté d'une flaque d'eau (Hugh Chittenden)